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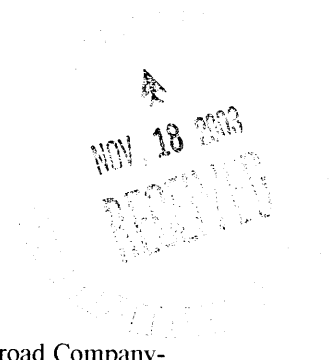
1227 Vista Bonita
New Braunfels, Texas 78130

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Schweers Historical Foundation, Inc.

November 13, 2003

Rini Ghosh
Surface Transportation Board
Section of Environmental Analysis
1925 K Street, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20423-0001



Re: STB Finance Docket 34284, Southwest Gulf Railroad Company-
Construction and Operation Exemption- Medina County, Tx

Dear Rini Ghosh:

This letter is in response to a letter dated October 10, 2003 from Victoria Rutson, Chief of Section of Environmental Analysis, inviting me to participate as a consulting party to the section 106 process of NHPA. I have read the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment report enclosed with this letter.

I also acknowledge receipt of a letter dated October 23, 2003 from Ms. Rutson with a copy of an SEA study of potential vibration impacts to cultural resources in the area of the proposed project, which I have read.

I am a 5th generation descendant of Texas German immigrants, and was born in the Texas Hill Country. I have a full appreciation of it's natural beauty, and therefore have a strong inclination to support preservation of Texas rural areas in their pristine condition when practical.

I am also a strong supporter of the American free-enterprise system, and believe that the most citizens are best served by allowing our businesses to flourish. I believe we must not hamstring our country with unnecessary and expensive stumbling blocks for our people and our businesses.

I am a graduated civil engineer with fifty years experience in general construction, both as an employee and owner. We completed many Corp of Engineer projects, schools, historical restorations, and even some railroad work. The many advantages of a free, unencumbered business environment to the American public was deeply understood and appreciated by me.

Heinrich and Johanna Schweers are my great great grandparents. They were married in 1858, and had the "Henry Schweers House" constructed that same year (the dates shown in Table 3, page 24 of the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment is not correct). My grandfather Henry Schweers was born and reared in this home along with thirteen (13) siblings.

Some of my 1st cousins and I first learned of the existence of these historic homes after a family reunion on June 4, 1995... We decided that we should attempt to acquire and restore the Henry Home then owned by William Schweers. He died unexpectedly in 1998. Shortly afterward, Vulcan Material Company purchased the property, which included the Henry Schweers and the William Schweers Historic Homes, for a proposed railroad right-of-way to a proposed rock quarry.

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In early 2001, we met with Representatives of Vulcan Material Company about the possibility of purchasing the Henry Schweers Home. To our delight, they were very supportive of our interest. Subsequently, they have helped us create our non-profit Schweers Historical Foundation, Inc., and are donating both the Henry and the William homes, including some acreage. They did all this and more, yet not knowing that the railroad track would be approved for construction. Obviously, we hold this fine company in highest esteem. They are a strong community-oriented firm.

I provide the above information so you can better know my background, and the opinions I express herein. Hopefully they are constructive and unbiased.

After perusal of your supporting documents, I have the following comments regarding the routes:

1. **Alternative 1** skirts along the Quihi Creek quite a distance, which is not good for wildlife habitat. It then crosses the creek near large ponds and marshes teeming with wildlife, and then passes within 125 feet of the historic William Schweers Home and between the historic Heyo Schweers Home (noted as ruins on Figure 2, page 18). It is also two (2) miles longer than the Proposed Route. This is not a good route!
2. Alternate 2 likewise cross the Quihi Creek at the small, spring-fed ponds and marches, then passes between the Schweers family cemetery, and the Henry Schweers Home (within 250 feet). It also crosses an area near the Saathoff Historic Home and their family cemetery located south of the Quihi Creek on the Pichot property. This area has lots of historic and archaeological locations. I consider this not a good Alternate route. This route is noted as 1000 feet longer than the Proposed Route.
3. Alternate 3 passes within 250 feet of the Oeffinger Cottage, and between the Two (2) Saathoff Cottages, and the Cottage Ruins noted on Figure 3, page 29. It is 2500 lineal feet longer than the Proposed Route. This is a better route than Alternates 1 and 2 in my opinion, but no doubt more costly.
4. The No-Build Alternative would be a horrible selection from the viewpoint of public safety, road traffic, noise, public nuisance, unsightliness, dust, environment, and economy.
5. The Proposed Route is by far the superior, in my opinion. It crosses the Quihi Creek at a location that often is dry, and has no marches, or significant ponds. It appears to take advantage of the pipe line right-of-way. It is 250 lineal feet from the Henry Schweers Historic Home, but otherwise avoids close proximity of other historic structures and environmentally sensitive areas. I also think it will prove to be the most economically feasible point to cross the Quihi Creek. It will be screened somewhat by existing trees.

On paragraph 3.1, page 28 is stated, "SEA's cultural resources assessment preliminarily concludes that the proposed construction and operation of SGR's rail line *would not directly impact or affect* any known significant cultural resources.

On page 30 is stated, "Potential impacts from rail operations to any of the cultural resources would be *indirect impacts* in the form of aesthetics, view, vibration, and dust." I offer the following:

1. **Aesthetics:** I do not personally find a train working its way across the countryside a problem regarding aesthetics. In fact, I think they are rather interesting. This is happening every day across America, and portrays our power, economic strength, and vitality. Besides, it is absolutely necessary to our well being.
2. **View:** This apparently has to do with the appearance of the railroad tracks and bridges. This is the same situation as with all the highways and roadways we drive on everyday. People build these things totally out of proportion to reality because it's something new. Once the novelty wears off, they will hardly notice the bridge and tracks. A roll of trees between the

Henry Schweers Home and the tracks for several hundred yards would help the aesthetics near the historic homes. This is in a remote area on a country gravel road with little traffic!

3. **Vibration:** With reference to the letter dated October 23, 2003, a copy of a study by SEA was enclosed regarding potential vibration impacts to cultural resources in the area of the proposed project. This was provided to assist in my review of the report requested in the October 10, 2003 letter which included the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment report for the proposed rail and construction operation.

Para. 1.2.1.1 Construction: The last sentence concludes, "Based on the distance from the source of the proposed construction to known cultural resources, there would be *no significant impact* to known cultural resources as a result of ground-borne vibration.

Para. 1.2.1.2 Operation: The last sentence concludes, "The closest historic structure to the proposed route would be at least 250 feet from the tracks. No cultural resource would be located within the 45-foot impact distance from the tracts. Thus, there would be *no ground-borne vibration impacts to known cultural resources* as a result of proposed railroad operations.

Your thorough, professional study regarding vibrations from construction and operations of the trains, etc. clearly show that vibrations should not adversely effect the various structures along the Proposed Route.

4. **Dust:** It is my judgment that four train trips per day with railroad cars rolling on steel rails transporting recently washed limestone aggregate creates a lot less dust than 900 truck trips per day driving down the highways! Natural windstorms that you can do nothing about will create much, much more dust than these four (4) trains in a 24 hr. day. We need to use some common sense here!

This concludes my written comments you requested. I appreciate the time and professional approach the STB, the SEA, the URS Corporation of Austin and the Vulcan Material Company and the SGR have taken to protect the interests of the Quihi community, the preservation of our history, etc., and at the same time make some progress in providing important materials for our industries.

Thank you!



Donald S. Schoch